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Potts, Deborah. 2020: *Broken Cities: Inside the Global Housing Crisis*. London: Zed Press. 319 pp. £70.00 hardcover, £18.99 paper. ISBN: 1786990547.

At various times over the still-unfolding pandemic, many global populations have been told to ‘stay at home’. For some, this means comfort; for others, a leaky roof, or no roof at all. In ‘*Broken Cities*’, Deborah Potts (Emeritus Reader in Human Geography, King’s College London) unspools the housing crisis, portraying it as very much a global urban problem, and, crucially for the book, largely a question of demand, rather than supply. It is these two key arguments that differentiate this book from most other recent explorations of the problems of urban housing.

Through a comparative urbanism, Pott’s exposition flattens the distance between Harare and London, Shenzhen and Johannesburg, Bogota and Singapore, while still illuminating what makes their unique crises distinct. Potts links ‘Generation Rent’ (those locked out of home ownership and saddled with housing costs in the UK) to those living in Hong Kong’s ‘cage housing’, alongside those in backyard shacks in Zimbabwe. Unifying the cases, as Potts argues, are structurally-broken approaches to housing policy. Another global urban trend Potts identifies is that housing prices have escalated exponentially under neoliberalism, but wages have been stagnant. This, according to Potts, has cut the housing market into two halves: one for the highly-paid, and another for the majority who struggle just to survive in urban life. The central argument is that supply of *more* housing, therefore, cannot address this problem, unless there are either vastly larger state interventions in housing provision (as there were before neoliberalism), or vastly higher wages, or both.

Pott’s descriptions of the horrors of contemporary housing conditions, from the Grenfell Tower’s tragic fire in London to the unregulated pop-up housing so common to large cities of the Global South, recall Dickensian images. Indeed, Potts deploys Dickensian vignettes throughout the book to bridge together the 19th century with today. Also notable is the

bridging of South to North. Pott's research has long been anchored in Sub-Saharan Africa, so the view of the housing crisis is informed with a Southern lens. This is essential reading, because it not only demystifies the tropes of Southern housing 'informality' and false notion that it is incomparable with the situation in wealthy Northern cities like London (or expensive Eastern cities like Singapore or Hong Kong), but also, Potts globalizes the discussion on housing financing and investment. Potts shows that it is not just prime-exemplar cities like London that are shaped by forces of real-estate capital in hyper-drive, but nearly all large cities, albeit via locally-constituted pathways and subject to territorial histories, contexts, and planning regimes.

It is this context-specific dive into comparative housing trajectories and the details of local policies, through selected case studies from South, North, and East, that are the book's greatest asset. The book enhances the comparative gesture in urban studies as well as the 'planetary turn' in gentrification studies. Potts also greatly expands the nascent work on demand-focused solutions to housing crises, as opposed to the orthodoxy on supply as the fits-all approach. This seems apt, given the current debates on workers' rights and the growing momentum for 'living wage' policies in Southern and Northern contexts.

Another contribution of the book is its embedded critique of hegemonic understandings of poverty metrics in development studies which, Potts rightly asserts, do not encapsulate fully the city-level affective experiences of poverty, the relative poverty of high housing costs. This is an important critique, for it brings to light how social class on paper does not always translate to the lived experience of housing misery. It also flattens the binary between South and North by highlighting the similarities, rather than differences, of navigating urban life when housing insecurity is a facet of daily life.

The book has useful discussions of different policy experiments that have been applied to varying degrees of success depending on local contexts in different moments in time. For example, South Africa's post-Apartheid efforts to provide housing grants to the poor, which resulted in millions gaining access to stable (if basic) accommodation for the first time. Singapore is held up as an example of an affluent city-state that made state housing provision central to its development policy. Potts also traces the arc of housing reform movements from the Victorian era through African post-colonialism to illustrate the way that state intervention comes in, and out, of fashion. All this points to optimism and some hope that large-scale housing provision for the urban poor may yet again become fashionable, and that successful historical efforts offer ready-to-use blueprints to move cities out of the current crisis. Despite this hopeful posturing, the overall undercurrent of the book is one of despair, with a plethora of statistics that show just how stark the crisis has become, and just how intransigent neoliberal policies have remained in recent years.

With these overall strengths in mind, there are some key omissions in the book. China's state-capitalist model is discussed, but rather cursorily. In a global discussion of housing policy, I'd think China's cities would deserve a bit more attention, given the complexity of the state-market hybrid and the growing influence of Chinese-style development in places like Sub-Saharan Africa. Also, as a reader, I wanted to know more about the relationship of housing markets in second and third-tier cities, towns, villages, to the expensive larger cities that are the foci of the book. London aside, what is going on in Newcastle, or Salt Lake City, or a smaller city in Zimbabwe? Finally, Potts is rather ambiguous about a path forward. Does this crisis have workable, tangible, and achievable solutions, or will it spiral indefinitely, resulting in some catastrophic end? Leaving open such possibilities has value, but leaves the reader wanting a follow-up which, perhaps, Potts will provide once radical alternatives have come into fashion once more.

Omissions aside, the book covers the housing crisis with great depth and will be of interest to those across a wide spectrum of academic disciplines (Geography, International Development, Urban Planning, and more) and practitioner circles as well (the book would make great reading for the NGO policy set). The global reach of the case studies will also be of interest to those interested in housing and urban development from South, East, and North.

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